



# Todd Platts

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**Congressional  
Update**

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Dear Friend,

I hope this letter finds you well. With the first year of the 108<sup>th</sup> Session of Congress now complete, I am pleased to update you on the actions of Congress thus far on various major policy issues, as well as to summarize legislation I introduced promoting financial accountability within the Department of Homeland Security and workplace protections for federal employees who report serious cases of waste, fraud, or abuse within the federal government. If you have any questions regarding any of the items discussed in this newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With many men and women in uniform serving our Nation in harm's way far from home, I hope you will continue to keep these courageous individuals and their families in your thoughts and prayers. But for the unwavering service of these patriotic Americans and those who served before them, we would not be blessed with the unparalleled freedoms and liberties that we enjoy everyday. God bless you and God bless America!

Sincerely,

Todd Russell Platts

## Agreement Reached on Veterans' Disability Payments

For over 100 years, federal law wrongly banned so-called "concurrent receipt" of military retirement benefits and veteran disability payments. As one who is eternally grateful for the devoted service of our Nation's veterans, I have supported efforts to end this terrible inequity. Thankfully, Congress has taken one more step toward fully achieving this worthy goal. Included in the fiscal year 2003 defense authorization bill (H.R. 1588), the most recent concurrent receipt agreement will provide more than \$20 billion in additional funds over the next 10 years for disabled military retirees. Approximately 250,000 retirees will benefit from this reform, which was signed into law by President George Bush on November 24.

From 1891 until 1999, military retirees had a dollar of their retirement benefits forfeited for every dollar they received in disability payments from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Beginning in 1999, Congress allowed partial concurrent receipt for military retirees who became severely disabled within 4 years of retiring. Next, in 2001, Congress increased the allowable amount of concurrent receipt and included additional disabled military retirees. In 2002, Congress allowed full concurrent receipt for retirees rated at 60% combat-related disabled or higher and for all Purple Heart awardees.

H.R. 1588 phases-in full concurrent receipt over the next 10 years for all military retirees rated at 50% disabled or higher, regardless of their disability circumstances. Additionally, effective January 1, 2004, full concurrent receipt is allowed for all "combat-related" disabled military retirees - including national guardsmen and reservists - regardless of their percent disabled or whether they were awarded a Purple Heart. For more information regarding this issue, please go to the House Armed Services Committee web site at: <http://armedservices.house.gov>.

## Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Signed Into Law

Partial-birth abortion, a procedure in which an infant is partially delivered when killed, should not be legal in a civilized society. Thankfully, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate passed legislation by votes of 281-142 and 64-34 respectively to ban partial-birth abortion. Having long supported this important legislation, I attended the November 5 ceremony at which President George Bush signed this legislation into law and stated: "By acting to prevent partial-birth abortion, the elected branches of our government have affirmed a basic standard of humanity, the duty of the strong to protect the weak. The wide agreement among men and women on this issue, regardless of [partisan affiliation], shows that bitterness in [partisan] debate can be overcome by compassion and the power of conscience."

### **Hands-on Experience -**

*Through the 19<sup>th</sup> District Internship Association's program, 6 local college students worked 10 weeks in my district and Washington offices last summer to learn about Congressional operations and to serve 19<sup>th</sup> District residents. Pictured above are: **Megan Yasenchak**, a Dickinson College senior and daughter of Michael and Patricia Yasenchak; **Paul Kingston**, a recent Lafayette College graduate and son of Don and Marianne Kingston of Gettysburg; **Maura Kroh**, a Bucknell University senior and daughter of Loren and Faye Kroh of York; **Sarah Wolf**, a Shippensburg University senior and daughter of Harold and Elaine Wolf of New Cumberland; **Nate Berry**, a University of Pennsylvania senior and son of Kehl and Deborah Berry of Red Lion; and **Matt Boyer**, a Penn State University senior and son of Richard and Kathryn Boyer of Biglerville.*



## Proposals Seek to Strengthen Immigration Laws

A common and understandable concern expressed by many constituents is immigration, especially illegal immigration, and the protection of our Nation's borders. Even as America remains a beacon of hope for people throughout the world, there is a critical need for Congress to continue the process of reforming and strengthening our immigration laws.

Last session Congress enacted legislation which tightened the student visa system, requires foreign passports and visas to contain fingerprints or other "biometric information," and requires aircraft and ships traveling to the U.S. from abroad to make their passenger lists available to American law enforcement officials. Congress also abolished the Immigration and Naturalization Service and reorganized its duties within the newly established Department of Homeland Security.

These initial steps must be supplemented with additional measures. I am a cosponsor of four bills regarding immigration. First, H.R. 3052 would withhold federal

highway funds from states that allow driver's licenses and identification cards to be issued to illegal immigrants. In addition to the security concerns surrounding such a practice, it is simply wrong to ignore violations of the law by extending the privilege of driving to those who are unlawfully present in the country.

Second, I am a cosponsor of H.R. 1631, which addresses the issue of Mexico proposing an agreement with the United States to extend Social Security benefits to illegal immigrants. H.R. 1631 would expressly disqualify work performed by a non-citizen while unlawfully present in the United States from counting towards the earning of Social Security benefits.

Third, I have cosponsored H.R. 2849, which would close loopholes and strengthen enforcement in the H1-B and L-1 visa programs that allow employers to bring immigrants into the country and hire them. While such visas are sometimes legitimately needed to fill positions that are vacant due to shortages in the domestic labor pool, it is

imperative that H1-B and L-1 visas not be misused to replace domestic workers with cheaper foreign labor.

Finally, recognizing the importance of all levels of government cooperating in the effort to combat illegal immigration, I co-sponsored H.R. 2671 to allow the 700,000 law enforcement officers across the country to assist Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services agents in enforcing the more than 400,000 final deportation orders on illegal immigrants residing inside the United States. H.R. 2671 would also create a new category in the National Crime Information Center for all violators of immigration law and ensure that the information is readily accessible to every local police officer.

H.R. 3052 is currently pending in the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, while H.R. 1631 is pending in the Ways and Means Committee. H.R. 2849 and H.R. 2671 are currently pending in the Committee on the Judiciary.



▲ *Patriot Day Ceremony* - On September 11, 2003, I was privileged to participate in a Patriot Day ceremony at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Hanover, where Mayor Maggie Hormel and other community leaders paid tribute to local fire, police, and emergency medical personnel, as well as our armed forces. Entitled "No Greater Love," the service reminded all to never forget those who lost their lives in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the heroism of the first responders who saved countless others, and the courage of our military personnel who are serving in harm's way to protect all Americans.

*Exploring the Susquehanna* – In September, I joined Tom Wolf, Chairman of the Lancaster-York Heritage Region Board of Directors, his daughter Katie Wolf, and other supporters of the Heritage Region on a 5-mile kayak trip to explore the environmental and recreational resources of the Region's Susquehanna River Water Trail. This new water trail is part of the National Park Service's Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. ▼



## Financial Relief for Military Personnel and Families Adopted

The House and the Senate unanimously passed the [Fallen Patriots Tax Relief Act \(H.R. 3365\)](#) to increase military death benefits and provide certain tax relief to our men and women in uniform. Signed into law by President George Bush on Veterans Day, November 11, H.R. 3365 doubles the death benefit paid to the survivors of military personnel killed in the line of duty from \$6,000 to \$12,000. Last increased in 1991, from \$3,000 to \$6,000, the death benefit is also now completely tax-exempt. Prior to passage of H.R. 3365, only \$3,000 of the death benefit was tax-exempt.

H.R. 3365 includes an "above-the-line" deduction for all transportation, meals, and lodging expenses for National Guard and Reserve personnel who travel more than 100 miles to attend Guard or Reserve activities. H.R. 3365 also allows more active-duty servicemembers to qualify for the "principal residence" exemption from capital gains taxes and to receive extensions on filing federal income tax returns. Additionally, H.R. 3365 permits education savings account funds to be withdrawn for attendance at the various military academies, helps to preserve the tax-exempt status of certain veterans' organizations, and clarifies the tax treatment of certain military homeowner and child care benefits.

## Medicare Prescription Drug Bill Passes Congress

After years of debate but no action, Congress has finally enacted legislation (H.R. 1) to add a much-needed prescription drug benefit to the Medicare program. I voted in favor of this long overdue and critically important legislation.

When Medicare was created, prescription drugs were not common for chronic disease treatments. While medical advances have produced effective drug therapies for many diseases during the ensuing 38 years, Medicare's benefits structure has not kept up. For example, Medicare would not cover the \$30 per month cost of Glucophage that helps a senior to control their diabetes but would cover a \$6,700 hospitalization due to renal kidney failure associated with diabetes.

Beginning in 2004, H.R. 1 provides relief to seniors through a Medicare prescription drug discount card. Such cards are expected to produce cost savings of 15% to 25%. Low-income seniors will also receive a \$600 annual credit towards their prescription drug costs. Beginning in 2006, Medicare will make a voluntary prescription drug benefit available to all seniors. Premiums are estimated at being about \$35 per month. The stan-

dard benefit structure would include: a \$250 deductible; coverage of 75% of all drug costs up to \$2,250; and coverage of 95% of all drug costs above \$3,600.

Seniors with incomes below 150% of the poverty line and assets of no more than \$10,000 for an individual or \$20,000 for a couple would have more generous coverage. H.R. 1 is designed to allow PA's PACE program to "wrap around" the Medicare drug benefit, thus allowing a greater number of Pennsylvanians to qualify for more generous coverage.

H.R. 1 modernizes Medicare in other ways as well. For example, Medicare will begin offering preventative benefits, such as a free initial physical, screenings for diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and updated reimbursements for physicians to ensure seniors continue to have a choice of doctors.

Sample projected cost savings and answers to common questions about H.R. 1 are found below. For more information about H.R. 1, please call my office or visit the Ways and Means Committee website at [waysandmeans.house.gov](http://waysandmeans.house.gov).

**Example #1: Senior currently spending \$1,891 annually\* (or \$1,607.35 after a 15% discount):**

### Out of Pocket Expenses

\$35/month premium	\$420
\$250 deductible	\$250
25% of \$1,357.35	\$339.34

**Total Out of Pocket: \$1009.34 vs. \$1,891 = 47% savings**  
\* Estimated median prescription drug spending in 2006

**Example #2: Senior currently spending \$3,000 annually (or \$2,550 after a 15% discount):**

### Out of Pocket Expenses

\$35/month premium	\$420
\$250 deductible	\$250
25% of \$2,000	\$500
100% of \$300*	\$300

**Total Out of Pocket: \$1,470 vs. \$3,000 = 51% savings**  
\* \$300 is difference between \$2,250 and \$2,550

**Q: Am I required to purchase prescription drug coverage under this legislation?**

A: No. The program is completely voluntary.

**Q: Will I have to enroll in an HMO to obtain prescription drug benefits?**

A: No. H.R. 1 requires that Medicare beneficiaries have a choice between at least 2 competing plans, at least 1 of which must be a prescription drug only plan for seniors who want to remain in the traditional Medicare fee-for-service program.

**Q: I currently have a plan sponsored by a former employer. Will H.R. 1 cause me to lose this plan?**

A: No. In fact, H.R. 1 seeks to slow and hopefully reverse the growing trend of employers dropping prescription drug coverage for retirees due to skyrocketing costs. Employers that maintain prescription drug plans equivalent to or more generous than the standard benefit in H.R. 1 would be reimbursed by Medicare up to 28% of their retiree drug costs not exceeding \$5,000 per retiree.



▲ *Eagle Scout Honored* – Recognizing the strong moral character, values, and leadership skills of 19<sup>th</sup> District Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts when they achieve the rank of Eagle and receive their Gold Award respectively is an inspiring experience. Camp Hill Troop #54 Scout *Joshua Gallaher*, son of Corey and Anne Deeter Gallaher, is the most recent Eagle Scout to whom I presented a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition and U.S. flag.

*Anniversary Commemoration*– On the occasion of the Gettysburg Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Shop's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I was pleased to join with Mayor *William Troxell* in presenting Hospital Board Chair *Louise Mains*, Auxiliary President *Kay Orndorff*, and Thrift Shop Chair *JoAnn Sheller* a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition. In addition to providing affordable clothing to those in need, the Thrift Shop has generated approximately \$1 million for the Hospital's purchase of equipment such as Advanced Life Support (ALS) units. ALS personnel *Robert Hower* and *Thomas Rooney* also participated in the commemoration. ▼



## Platts Introduces Legislation to Strengthen Whistleblower Protections

On October 8, I introduced the [Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act \(H.R. 3281\)](#) to strengthen the protections afforded federal employees who report serious cases of waste, fraud, and abuse within the federal government. H.R. 3281 is the companion bill to legislation introduced in the Senate by Senators Daniel Akaka and Charles Grassley (S. 1358).

Federal whistleblowers, whose dedication to responsible government can wrongly lead to bureaucratic harassment, career damage, and even job loss, were first given legal protection in 1978. As a result of findings that the initial protections were inadequate, Congress and the first Bush Administration increased whistleblower protections with the enactment of the Whistleblower Protection Act (WPA) of 1989. Congress further strengthened said protections in 1994. Despite these repeated attempts to ensure whistleblowers receive adequate legal protection, the District of Columbia Federal Circuit Court, which has sole authority to review federal whistleblower cases, has again-and-again failed to follow the intent of Congress to protect “any” disclosure of illegalities, gross mismanagement, or dangers to the public health and safety.

For example, the Federal Circuit has ruled that an employee is not protected by the WPA if he or she directs criticism to other witnesses or supervisors in an attempt to start the process of challenging misconduct, which is almost always the way whistleblower cases begin. The Court has also stated that an employee is not protected by the WPA if the information disclosed was done so in the course of his or her ordinary job duties, such as while performing an audit of the agency in question. The Court has further ruled that an employee is not protected by the WPA if the information disclosed has already been raised by someone else. This means that WPA protections are afforded only to the first person to expose a problem, not to those who come forward later. A total of 75 whistleblower cases have come before the D.C. Federal Circuit Court since 1994. Only one whistleblower, however, has prevailed. This track record has no doubt intimidated potential whistleblowers into silence.

H.R. 3281 makes it clear that any disclosure of information is protected “without restriction to time, place, form, motive, context, or prior disclosure made to any person by an employee or applicant, including a disclosure made in the ordinary course of an employee’s duties.” This legislation would also eliminate the D.C. Federal Circuit Court’s monopoly jurisdiction over WPA cases. H.R. 3281 is currently pending in the House Committee on Government Reform.



*Honoring the Flag* - As part of this year’s Veterans Day ceremonies, I was proud to attend the dedication of a new flag pole at the Brethren Home Community in New Oxford. Joining me were Brethren Home residents [Paul Rudisill](#) and [Frank Lookingbill](#). Paul proudly served our country in the United States Army, while Frank is a veteran of the United States Navy.

## House Passes DNA Bill

Passed by a vote of 357 – 67 in the House on November 5, the [Advancing Justice Through DNA Technology Act \(H.R. 3214\)](#) seeks to recognize the increasingly important role that DNA testing plays in the criminal justice system - both to convict the guilty and to exonerate the innocent. I voted in support of this legislation.

H.R. 3214 consists of two primary sections. First, H.R. 3214 would provide grants to state and local governments to help them overcome a backlog in the testing of DNA samples from sexual assaults. Currently, there is an estimated testing backlog of 160,000 to 500,000 “rape kits.” Eliminating this backlog could potentially bring countless numbers of rapists to justice. Second, H.R. 3214 would streamline procedures for federal inmates to obtain court orders to test DNA evidence and provide states with incentives to adopt similar procedures. Such testing would be allowed only where it could produce “new material evidence” demonstrating a reasonable probability that the inmate did not commit the offense for which he or she has been imprisoned.

New kinds of DNA testing developed in recent years are far more likely to obtain conclusive results than earlier forms of DNA testing. In addition, the newer DNA tests can be used on very small, old trace evidence. The case of Ray Krone, a York County native who wrongly spent more than 10 years in an Arizona prison before being cleared of murder charges through DNA testing, demonstrates how important it is for the criminal justice system to utilize the latest science can offer to demonstrate the innocence or guilt of individuals. For more information regarding H.R. 3214, which is now pending in the Senate, please go to the House Committee on the Judiciary’s website at [www.house.gov/judiciary](http://www.house.gov/judiciary).



*200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* – September 6 marked the commemoration of Fairview Township’s 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Participants in the anniversary event, at which I presented a Congressional citation, included (left to right): Supervisors [John Mickle III](#) and [Perry Albert](#), Senator [Hal Mowery](#), Supervisor and retired U.S. Army Colonel [William Brown](#), U.S. Navy Captain [Robert Ritchey](#), Supervisor [E.R. McCollum](#), myself, and Supervisor [Mario Pirritano](#).

# Congress Enacts Funding for Iraq and Afghanistan

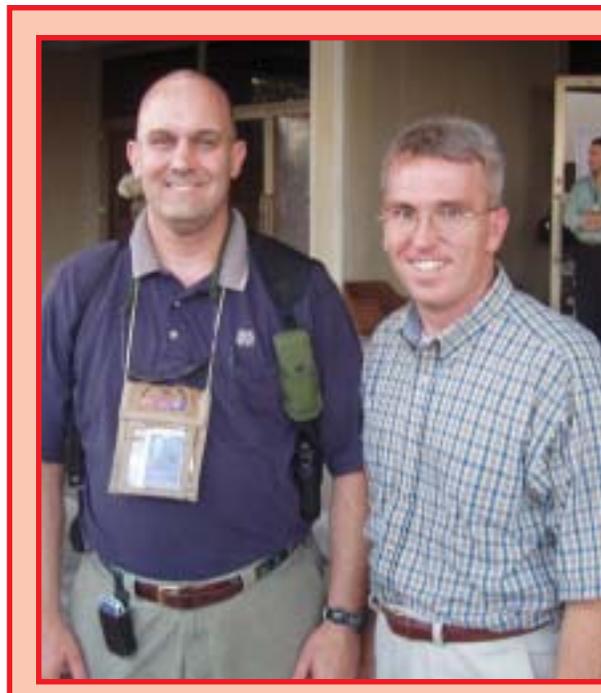
Throughout the 1980s, the U.S. helped the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan to oppose the Soviet Union's invasion of their country. Following the Soviet's withdrawal in 1989, the U.S. ended its involvement in Afghanistan. A vacuum was created and subsequently filled by the Taliban and al-Qaida. On September 11, 2001, the connection between what happens in the mountains of Afghanistan and the security of American citizens here at home became tragically apparent. We cannot afford to make the same mistake in Iraq.

On October 31, I joined with 297 colleagues in supporting legislation (H.R. 3289) to provide \$64.7 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as \$18.6 billion for Iraqi reconstruction efforts. President George Bush signed H.R. 3289 into law on November 6. Prior to passage, Congress made various important changes to the President's original funding request. A total of \$801 million in non-priority projects were deleted, including funds for garbage trucks, traffic police, and the Iraqi postal service and telephone system. Alternatively, Congress added \$539 million to purchase additional flak jackets and light-armored HUMVEEs to better protect our troops in Iraq. Language was also added to reauthorize and increase imminent danger pay and family separation allowances for U.S. military personnel.

An effort to convert part of the reconstruction funds into loans was defeated. I opposed this effort for several reasons. Although the primary responsibility for rebuilding Iraq after years of neglect by Saddam Hussein resides with the Iraqis themselves and at the long-term expense of Iraq's oil revenues, it is in America's national security interests to assist with this undertaking. Providing grants rather than loans gives the U.S. the international credibility it needs to demand that nations like France and Germany forgive the almost \$200 billion in debt Iraq incurred under Saddam Hussein.

Providing grants rather than loans also makes it clear that the invasion of Iraq was not about profit or oil, but about the security of America and other nations throughout the world and the freedom of the Iraqi people.

Prior to voting on H.R. 3289, I traveled to Iraq as part of a bi-partisan delegation. I was honored to convey the gratitude of 19<sup>th</sup> District citizens to our troops for their devoted service and immeasurable contributions to the security of our Nation. Our troops exhibited remarkable courage, skill, and determination in defeating Saddam's Hussein's military. They are now exhibit-



*War College Staff Member Serves In Iraq – As part of my trip to Iraq to assess our military's needs and morale, I had the privilege to meet briefly with U.S. Army Lt. Colonel Mike Esper. A Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute staff member at the Army War College in Carlisle since 2000, Lt. Colonel Esper served in Baghdad for six months. Lt. Colonel Esper's duties included management of the Iraq Forum, which is the headquarters for more than 25 agencies that are part of the Coalition Provisional Authority's reconstruction efforts.*

ing an equal level of courage, skill, and determination in rooting out regime loyalists, foreign terrorists, and common criminals who are determined to obstruct Iraq's transformation into a peaceful, democratic nation.

Much of our time in Iraq focused on getting a firsthand understanding of coalition stabilization efforts. Our delegation met extensively with U.S. Army General Ricardo Sanchez and other senior American and coalition nation military and civilian leaders. General Sanchez emphasized that electrical, water, and security infrastructure improvements will not only improve the quality of life of Iraqis, but also the security of our troops in Iraq. Such improvements will help to build the foundation for transferring sovereignty back to the Iraqi people and a quicker return home for our troops.

General Sanchez stated that success in Iraq will not be achieved through military action alone. Rather, such success will ultimately be won through Iraq's economic revitalization, political transformation, and the expansion of Iraq's own security forces.

Our delegation's visit to a mass gravesite near Al Hillah and the newborn intensive care unit at Al Yarmuk Hospital in Baghdad were two of our more somber visits. The remains of approximately 3,000 men, women, and children were found in the Al Hillah gravesite, one of countless mass gravesites throughout Iraq. These individuals, including infant children, were executed by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991 as part of the mass execution of at least 300,000 Shiites.

The chief administrator at Al Yarmuk Hospital, an Iraqi physician, described Saddam Hussein's refusal to invest in Iraq's healthcare system and intentional inflation of Iraq's infant mortality rate to a staggering rate of over 100 deaths per 1,000 births. While there is much work to be done and significant security risks remain in Iraq, there are many signs that peace has gained a solid foothold.

Among these signs were the sight of children cheering on the Coalition forces as they escorted our convoy, grateful and hopeful words of Iraqi local officials, civilian traffic congestion on the streets, the return of power generation to pre-war levels, the training and deployment of 140,000 Iraqi security officers and the existence of more than 170 free and independent newspapers in Iraq. With the continued assistance of the U.S. and our allies, the people of Iraq are on the path to transforming their country into a peaceful, democratic nation.

Completing such a transformation will not be easy or quick. Its achievement, however, will greatly strengthen America's national security and dramatically improve the quality of life of all Iraqis.



*Serving at Home and Overseas – My trip to Iraq also focused on relations between American forces and Iraqi leaders. My interactions included a visit with Major Mark Martin, a 19<sup>th</sup> District Army Reservist currently serving with the 352nd Civil Affairs Command in Baghdad. An Upper Allen Township police officer here at home, Major Martin is working with Iraqi officials on behalf of the Coalition Provisional Authority in helping to move Iraq towards democracy.*

## Energy Bill Approved by House

On November 18, the House of Representatives approved legislation to establish the first comprehensive national energy policy in more than a decade (H.R. 6) by a bi-partisan vote of 246-180. I voted in favor of H.R. 6 for several reasons.

First, reliable and affordable energy production is essential to the creation and preservation of jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector of our economy. Energy costs have a significant impact on many of our region's employer's. For example, one 19<sup>th</sup> District employer's natural gas bill more than doubled since 1999 – adding more than \$10 million to its costs. Such an increase dramatically affects this company's ability to compete in today's competitive global markets. H.R. 6 contains tax incentives and federal leasing policies aimed at encouraging domestic oil and natural gas production, incentives for "clean coal" technologies, and a provision to construct a pipeline for delivering natural gas from Alaska.

Second, especially in light of the current situation in the Middle East, reducing America's dependence on foreign energy supplies is vital to our national security. October marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of OPEC's oil embargo that shocked our economy and led to long lines at the gas pumps. At the time, America was 30 percent dependent on foreign oil. Today, that number has doubled to an all-time high of nearly 60 percent. This is obviously the wrong trend.

In addition to the incentives for domestic production mentioned above, H.R. 6 would more than double the use of ethanol in fuel by 2012, helping our local farmers while also reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. H.R. 6 also invests unprecedented amounts in the research and development of renewable and alternative energy sources. For example, \$3 billion in tax incentives are provided for the use of renewable fuels in producing electricity, \$2.2 billion in tax incentives are provided for the purchase of alternative fuel vehicles, authorization is provided for the President's hydrogen fuel

cell initiative, and grants are provided to facilities using "biomass" (i.e., organic sources like animal waste) for energy needs.

Third, H.R. 6 removes outdated regulations that inhibit investment in our electricity infrastructure while giving new powers to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to regulate the reliability of the transmission grid. The shortcomings of the current grid system were well evidenced in last summer's Northeast "black out."

H.R. 6 is being filibustered in the Senate. Failure of the Senate to adopt H.R. 6 or similar legislation early in 2004 will likely destroy any chance of Congress adopting a much-needed comprehensive energy policy for at least several years. For more information, please go to the Energy and Commerce Committee website at <http://energycommerce.house.gov>.



▲ *Apples Galore* – My most recent Career Awareness Day included a hands-on tour of the Knouse Foods Cooperative apple processing plant in Peach Glen, where 31-year employee *Frances Flagle* instructed me on the operation of the apple peeler/slicing machine. I also went on patrol with Liberty Township Chief of Police *Jim Holler*. Career Awareness Days help to keep me well grounded in the values of Central PA and provide valuable insights into the workdays of 19<sup>th</sup> District residents.

*Art Contest Winner* - Each year, the Congressional High School Art Competition recognizes the artistic talents of young citizens. The 19<sup>th</sup> District's 2003 winning entry was "Amor Patriae" (Love of One's Country), an oil still life painted by *Courtney Kinard*, a home-schooled student from Felton. Courtney's parents, *Monte and Faye Kinard*, and her art teacher, *Janice Godfrey*, joined her in Washington for the recognition ceremony. Information regarding the 2004 Competition can be found on my website at [www.house.gov/platts](http://www.house.gov/platts). ▼



## Platts' Financial Accountability Proposal Advances

On November 6, the House Government Reform Committee unanimously approved the [Department of Homeland Security Financial Accountability Act](#) (H.R. 2886), legislation I introduced to help ensure financial accountability at the newly-created Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Senate passed nearly identical legislation on November 21.

H.R. 2886 would apply the provisions of the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990 to DHS. Currently, all cabinet-level departments – except for DHS - are covered by the CFO Act, a 1990 law that

made sweeping reforms to government financial management. H.R. 2886 would also require an audit of the Department's internal accounting controls.

DHS' creation involved the consolidation of 22 agencies and approximately 170,000 federal employees. These agencies brought eighteen already identified material financial weaknesses to the new Department. Accordingly, federal law should not require less financial accountability at DHS than it does at other cabinet-level departments.

Under the strong leadership of Secretary Tom Ridge, DHS has shown a determina-

tion to be fiscally responsible. However, future administrations are not bound by law to follow this same path of fiscal responsibility. H.R. 2886 rectifies such a possibility by codifying compliance with the provisions of the CFO Act, the cornerstone of federal financial management.

A failure to apply the CFO Act to DHS would set a dangerous precedent by lowering the standing of the CFO within the Department and diminishing the importance of sound financial management of taxpayer funds.